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ABSTRACT

The school library plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning process. Every school, therefore, needs a properly organized library to ensure access to information. However, most countries do not have legislation that makes it mandatory for every school to have a library. In countries like Zimbabwe individual schools have made their own initiatives, resulting in some schools having well-developed libraries, while others to not have anything that resembles a library. This paper is based on a school library advocacy initiative being undertaken by the Junior Council of the City of Harare that seeks to: (1) create an awareness of the situation of school libraries in Zimbabwe through the production of a documentary; (2) collect reading material for distribution to selected disadvantaged schools; (3) raise funds for the purchase of more reading material; and (4) advocate through workshops for members of Parliament for positive legislation that provides room for the development of school libraries. Some notable achievements have been made since the inception of the project toward the end of 2000, and more seems likely to be achieved as great interest has been expressed by many, including the corporate world. (MES)

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Say yes to school library provision – a project by the Harare Junior Council

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Abstract:

The school library plays a crucial role in the teaching and learning process. Every school, therefore, needs a properly organised library to ensure access to information by teaching staff, pupils as well as technical or administrative staff. However, most countries do not have legislation that make it mandatory for every school to have a library, and in countries like Zimbabwe, individual schools have made their own initiatives, resulting in some schools having well developed libraries, while others do not have anything that resembles a library. This paper is based on a school library advocacy initiative being undertaken by the Junior Council of the City of Harare which seeks to sensitize the community, and more importantly, the legislators, on the need for school libraries with the hope that they will pass legislation that commits government and/or other responsible authorities on the need to take school library service as high priority. Some notable achievements have been made since the inception of the project towards the end of 2000, and more seems likely to be achieved as great interest has been expressed by many, including the corporate world.

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Introduction

Article 17 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that "State parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to

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information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health. To this end, State Parties shall:

(a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child …;

(b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;

(c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;

(d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;

(e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his well being….

Thomas Hammarberg, in his UNICEF published book A School for children with rights states that "A child-centred school gives the teacher a new role… A modern teacher will organize activities, provide materials, stimulate, guide and give advice. The pupils should have opportunities to 'learn how to learn' as a basis for continued, lifelong learning. A good library as the center of the school could encourage children to find out through their own initiative."

The Revised Draft outcome document A World fit for children also states that "***We are determined to ensure access by families, caregivers and children themselves to a full range of information and services to promote child survival, development, protection and participation …***"

The document goes further to say "***Their (children) energy and creativity must be nurtured and developed as we help them acquire knowledge and skills to cope with the demands of adult life…***"

It goes further to call on the private sector and the business community to assume greater social and corporate responsibility for making the benefits of research and development in science, medical technology, food fortification, education and mass communication ***available to children in greatest need.***

Equally concerned about the situation of school libraries, UNESCO has teamed up with the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) to produce the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto, an instrument that is meant to help develop school libraries, and in the process fulfilling the requirements some of the articles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The manifesto states that ***"The school library provides information and ideas that are fundamental to functioning successfully in today's information and knowledge-based society. The school library equips students with life-long learning skills and develops their imagination, enabling them to live as responsible citizens"***.

And how is the situation in Zimbabwe? On page 101 of We are also human beings: a guide to children's rights in Zimbabwe, we are told that in a survey carried out in the mining communities had found out that "Children are the main people using libraries in Zimbabwe, but there are not nearly enough libraries to satisfy children's rights to books. Studies carried out by the Zimbabwe Book Development Council have also shown that the situation of school libraries in the majority cases is pathetic. This is why the Harare Junior Council embarked on this library advocacy initiative, through which Council intends to:

1. Create an awareness of the situation of school libraries in Zimbabwe through the production of a documentary.
2. Collect reading material for distribution to selected disadvantaged schools.
3. Raise funds for the purchase of more reading material.
4. Advocate through Parliament for positive legislation that provides room for the development of school libraries.

Documentary to Raise an Awareness of the Situation of School Libraries

Harare Junior Council decided to create awareness on the situation of school libraries in Zimbabwe through a video, which was to be screened by national television during the Zimbabwe International Book Fair 2001. The Zimbabwe International Book Fair was found appropriate as it gives an opportunity to bring the situation to the attention of the international book community in addition to the local Zimbabweans. In order to show a balanced picture of the school library situation in Zimbabwe, it was decided that schools to feature in the video had to be representative, covering both the well-provided for schools, and those that are not provided for at all, and should include the urban, peri-urban and rural settings.

Collection of reading material and fundraising

This has already started. The Harare Junior Council collected Over 3 000 books, which were donated to Zambuko Primary School as part of Harare Junior Council's contribution to International Children's Day of Broadcasting. More books have been sourced and will soon be disbursed to deserving schools within Harare and in Harare's peri-urban settlements. On 1 March 2001, a charitable organization donated Z$50 000.00 towards developing the Zambuko Primary School Library.

Harare Junior Council intends to continue to mobilize resources for disadvantaged schools, and has planned ***'Bring-A-Book' Musical Shows*** at which local musicians will perform to raise money to buy library books for selected schools. In addition to paying entrance fees, people attending the shows will also be requested to bring books, if they can. The first "Bring-A-Book" show took place on 28 April 2001 at the Harare International Conference Centre, while the second is planned to take place on the last day of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, 11 August 2001. While the first musical show failed to break even, it generated a lot of publicity as the Junior Councilors were called to national television, three radio stations, and to the print media to talk about the school library advocacy project. Over three hundred books were also brought in by people coming to the show. An important outcome of the show was that it drew the attention of the private sector, and one building society and one company involved in the manufacture of beverages contributed financially towards the show. A partnership agreement is expected to be reached soon with the building society.

Other functions such as fun days at schools and activities such as car washing will also be used to raise funds. Money raised will be used to buy library books for schools, or library equipment; and depending on how much money has been raised, some of it will be used for follow up seminars to discuss library policy issues.

Advocacy for Positive School Library Legislation-Workshop with Parliament

While mobilizing resources for selected deserving libraries will help collect library resources, this is a piece-meal approach, and a national solution will be to advocate for legislation that caters for school library development. A two day workshop was planned for at which Members of Parliament are sensitized on the right of the child to access appropriate information, the UNESCO/IFLA School Library Manifesto, and loopholes in the current library legislation as seen in the light of the issues raised in the

UNESCO/IFLA School Library Manifesto, as well as in the light of the requirements of the article 17 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Junior Council intended to run the workshop on 22-23 April 2001, but UNICEF, who had been approached to sponsor the workshop wanted the project document revised to reflect issues covered in the Global Movement for Children, a campaign spear-headed by UNICEF to assess progress made in fulfilling the provision of the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted at the World Summit for Children in 1990. At the time of writing, the document has been revised as required, and will be handed over to UNICEF soon. The workshop is expected to take place between May and August 2001.

The objectives of the workshop are:

1. To create an awareness among legislators on the right of the child to access information, hence the need for well furnished school libraries;
2. To demonstrate the uneven pattern of school library provision in Zimbabwe;
3. To familiarize legislators with the IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto;
4. To enable legislators to see one of the best school library systems in Zimbabwe (Prince Edward) so that they can compare with the library facilities existing at schools in their respective constituencies.

Harare Junior Council intends to invite the following people to this workshop, which it proposes to be held at Prince Edward High School during the May – August school term:

1. Members of Parliament from Harare (16)
2. Members of Parliament of Zimbabwe's Library Committee (9)
3. Members of Parliament of Zimbabwe's Education Committee (10 : two have been counted on the Library Committee which they also sit on)
4. A Representative of UNICEF Harare Office
5. A Representative of UNESCO's Harare Office
6. A Representative of The City of Harare Commission
7. A Representative of the National Libraries and Documentation Services, a department in the Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture
8. A Representative of the Zimbabwe Library Association
9. A Representative of the Ministry of Finance involved in the National Budget
10. Child librarians from 10 selected schools, or heads of the schools where there are no child librarians in the schools, or where children may not be comfortable speaking in front of such an audience.

Paper presentations proposed for the workshop are:

1. The Child Right to Access Information – UNICEF
2. The IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto – UNESCO
3. The Role of the School Library in improving the quality of Education – a librarian who has knowledge of school libraries
4. The National Library and Documentation Services Act's treatment of school libraries – National Library and Documentation Services
5. How different schools are doing it: presentations by persons selected from various school from Harare (covering both former group A and group B schools), peri-urban and rural areas.

Discussions will be held after the presentations, and representatives from the Education, Sport and Culture and Library parliamentary committees will be requested to say what they intend to do in order to improve school library provision in the country.

Conclusion

We certainly hope that more favorable responses from the donor community, the corporate world and society ir making this project a success.

The Government of Zimbabwe has launched a fund to financially assist children to go to school. T his is a very welcome move as more children now have access to free education but it is the Council's obligation to then assist by ensuring that those children that will go to school have books to read.

By educating one child an entire family has been educated, as that one boy/girl will then educate his siblings. This will then be a chain reaction that cannot be broken and that will see Zimbabwean Children making a difference not only in their lives but also in the life of this country.

Let us all join hands and

'For good quality education, Say Yes for school library provision.'

References:

1. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: adopted by the United Nations on 20 November 1989
2. A World fit for children, Preparatory Committee for the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Children, 11- 15 June, 2001
3. IFLA/UNESCO School Library Manifesto
4. We are also human beings: a guide to Children's rights in Zimbabwe